

S. E R M O N

PREACHED BEFORE

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The Right Hon. the LORD MAYOR,

AND THE

Worshipful the Court of ALDERMEN,

OF THE

CITY of LONDON.

In the Parish Church of St. LAWRENCE,

On the 28th Day of September, 1771.

By the Rev. ROBERT EVANS, M. A.

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THE RIGHT HON. THE LORD MAYOR

OF THE CITY OF LONDON

AND THE

COMMONS OF PARLIAMENT

IN PARLIAMENT ASSEMBLED

SHED THE

IN THE Tenth Year of SA. LXXXVIII

ON THE 15th DAY OF SEPTEMBER 1898

BY THE REV. ROBERT EVANS



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The Right Hon. BRASS CROSBY, Esq;

LORD MAYOR OF THE CITY OF LONDON;

THE FOLLOWING DISCOURSE

(IN GRATEFUL MEMORY OF HIS LORDSHIP'S PATRONAGE)

IS MOST RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED,

BY HIS LORDSHIP'S

MOST OBEDIENT

AND FAITHFUL SERVANT,

ROBERT EVANS.

TO

THE RIGHT HON. BRASS CROSBY, ESQ.

LORD MAYOR OF THE CITY OF LONDON;

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S E R M O N, &c.

PROVERBS IV. 25, 26, 27.

Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eye-lids look straight before thee.

Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established.

Turn not to the right hand, nor to the left; remove thy foot from evil.

SOLOMON, in the preceding verses, had been advising to take special care of the inclinations and affections of the soul, by strictly guarding the inward and secret springs, as well of our words as actions. *Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life: put away from thee*

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a froward mouth, and perverse lips put far from thee. And, in the words of the text, adds the most excellent rules for the well and right ordering of our actions; not only as to their *nature* and *quality* in general, but as to the *end for which they are done*, the *rules by which they are to be directed*, the *principles from which they proceed*, and the *circumstances with which they are attended*. Let thine eyes look right on, (says he) and let thine eye-lids look straight before thee: let the end which thou propolest *be good*; and always take care to pursue that good end in a right manner, by using *fair* and *direct means* for the attainment of it. Ponder the path of thy feet, weigh and consider well the *nature* and *tendency* of every action, before you engage in it; never act rashly or hastily, (especially in matters of great consequence) but in such manner as may justify your conduct to the world, by being able to give the best reason of your actions, as well to yourself as to others.

And let all thy ways be established. Act by *fixed rules* and *certain principles*; because such prescribed and determined principles are necessary to the establishing our ways; to make us act upon safe and sure grounds; to render us steady, constant, and uniform in our behaviour.

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Turn neither to the right hand, nor to the left. Cautionously avoid both *extremes*; not being so apprehensive of the danger on one side, as to neglect an equal, perhaps, a greater danger on the other.

And lastly. Remove thy foot from evil. Let no consideration, no motive whatever prevail at any time to entice you from the path of virtue and integrity. Let your intentions be ever so just; the end proposed ever so good; be the arguments to persuade ever so plausible; the motives to tempt you ever so alluring; pursue it not by methods *unjustifiable, immoral, and sinful*.

Such is the plain and obvious comment of the text. And it will be unnecessary to remind this assembly, that, did we constantly act by, and invariably pursue these excellent rules, we should effectually approve ourselves wise and good men in our several capacities and stations; and in the result of all our actions, thus *honestly* and *faithfully* directed, should certainly reap the merited advantage of our integrity, wisdom, and care.

But that I may pursue this subject suitably to the occasion of the present meeting, I shall beg leave to make some general reflexions upon the several particulars of the advice
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given by Solomon; and endeavour to shew you, how it may best be followed, in applying it to the immediate business of this day.

The first particular of this advice, is, that the end, the ultimate view of all our actions, should be good; that we propose to ourselves no other advantage than what must necessarily result from the justness and uprightness of our deeds; and that we come not forth with dishonest purposes, with base and unworthy designs. What should be the *main end* of *all* our pursuits is fully declared in the gospel of Christ; where we are frequently instructed “to do all to the glory of God;” which is strictly enjoined by the clearest dictates of impartial, uncorrupted reason: for he who is the *first cause*, ought certainly to be the *last end*. It is evident; we are not our own, and consequently cannot live to ourselves, but to him who gave us our beings, and on whom we continually and entirely depend. Now God is said to be glorified by men, when his *power, wisdom, goodness*, and all his other divine and infinite perfections are *observed, acknowledged, and made manifest* by them: and the glory of God is then only made our chief end, when we propose it to ourselves, *as the great design of our lives*, to act to those purposes for which our bountiful Creator gave us our existence; and to behave ourselves in all respects in such a manner, as
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may best correspond with that frame, in which he has wisely made us. We cannot add to the happiness of God but we may be the blessed instruments of each others happiness; for he hath created us *intelligent* and *rational agents*, who by doing good to ourselves, and to each other, may fully answer the end for which he sent us into the world; and, by so doing, abundantly promote, and shew forth his honour and glory.

In our *single* capacities, the glory of God is evidently our chief end, when we endeavour by the *rules of religion*, to improve our spirits, to keep our bodies in due subjection to them; to grow, as far as may be, into the likeness of our Maker; and earnestly to covet, and assiduously prepare ourselves for the enjoyment of him.

View us as *members of society*, and we then make the glory of God our end, when, laying aside all *narrow, selfish designs*, we endeavour with our utmost power to promote the *publick good*, the welfare of the world in general, and the immediate prosperity of that *society* to which we peculiarly belong; *the city*, or *the kingdom* of which we are members. Such ends as these, and none but such as are consistent with, and subordinate to these, will advance the glory of

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God; or the peace, order, and happiness of human society.

But secondly. We are advised to pursue every good end in a right manner; to use fair, honest, and direct means towards the attainment of it. This, as well as the former particular, seems to be included in the first exhortation of the text; “let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee.” History will furnish a long and melancholy example of the various evils which have flowed from the unfortunate neglect of this rule. And we need only review the events of former ages, to convince us of the necessity to bind ourselves to the strictest observance of it. How often hath a *pretended* zeal for the service of God, covered the basest designs against the publick order, and *his* honour been made the cloak of *our* shame! Let us consider, that the end, be it ever so just, will not, at all times, sanctify the means: and there is no honourable road, *even to the accomplishment of the best designs*, but that of *just and equitable dealing*. It is utterly inconsistent and contradictory in itself, to attempt the glory of God by any unrighteous means. To do him honour, is to do good: to use base, dishonourable, and indirect means, is manifestly to do evil; and, in fact, to destroy and counteract the very design which we pretended to promote. Those, therefore, who
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are seemingly intent upon promoting the best ends, should be careful to pursue them by such honest means, as may be fairly justified before God and men.

Thirdly. We are directed to weigh and consider well every action, before we engage in the execution of it; and in all matters of moment, to proceed with *deliberation, judgment, and prudence*; that in every action we may be able to give a good account to ourselves and others. *Ponder the path of thy feet.* We should impartially reflect upon the nature of every action we are entering upon. We must seriously consider not only what *will be*, but what *may be* the consequences of it. The frailty of human nature forbids us to know things *intuitively*, and at one view; but we are so far perfect, as to be endued with a power of deliberating within ourselves, which we can certainly never more advantageously exercise, than in guarding against the fatal *influences* of *prejudice* and *passion, humour* and *interest*; against the *crafty seduction* of those, who may have conciliated our esteem; and against the *violence of any party* to which we are (*be it ever so cordially*) united.

Fourthly. We are always to act by fixed rules, and upon certain principles. "Let all thy ways be established;" and they most assuredly never can be established, unless
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they are founded upon principles, and directed by rules.

The great principles upon which our actions, *as men and Christians*, are founded *by religion*, the *sacred bond* of *all human society*, are these: the firm belief of a God, and of a Providence; of the essential, eternal, and immutable difference between truth and falsehood, right and wrong, moral good, and evil; of the immortality of the soul, and the certainty of another life: that we are placed in this world under the characters of beings, accountable for every action to our supreme Creator: and that the measure of our future rewards will be strictly proportionate to the merit of our present virtue. These are the *only* steady principles upon which we can act with any security either to ourselves, or to our fellow creatures. He therefore who has thrown off a sense of God and of religion, has no principles to govern himself by, but remains the weak monument of human frailty, led by his own fickle and capricious humour; or by the mean and sordid motives of his own private interest; which will ever vary with the turn of his condition and circumstances in the world. By considering one part of our constitution, (the shortness and uncertainty of human life) we shall feel that we are accountable for our behaviour, by looking into the other (the dignity and infirmity

mity of human nature) that we stand in perpetual danger of error and wrong conduct. Reason, therefore, looks forward, and weighs the consequences of things; and when the eye of reason can reach no farther, the light of revelation rises upon us, and opens the boundless prospect of eternity. Thus the sure rules by which we are to direct all our actions are those of *right reason*, and the *revealed will of God*. There is *one law-giver* to all mankind, *that is God*; who alone can give us fixed and certain rules to act by, which he hath done, in part, by our very frame and constitution; and more clearly and fully in the holy scriptures. To these must we constantly appeal as our safest and truest guide. Amongst those laws which God hath prescribed to us, none are more obvious than those which relate to *civil government*. The end and design of which is fairly exhibited, that by a *cheerful and willing obedience*, it may be *comfortably enjoyed*. This end of government, is the welfare of society; and to carry on this noble end, provision is made for all *mutual and good offices*, and for the respective felicity of men in all conditions. And it is worth our consideration, (by the way) that the Christian religion *alone* hath established *liberty without licentiousness*, and settled *authority without tyranny and oppression*. But to return more immediately to Solomon's advice, we are

5thly, Carefully to avoid all extremes; not to be so apprehensive of the danger on one side, as to neglect or overlook, an equal, or perhaps a greater danger on the other. “ Turn neither to the right hand, nor to the left.”

It is a common observation, that the way of virtue lies between two extremes. That it is so situated in many instances, (though perhaps not in all) is sufficiently evident. Thus, for example, *genuine piety* is placed between *prophaneness* on one hand, and *superstition* on the other. *Justice* between *rigour*, and *laxness of discipline*. *Temperance* between an undue *severity* of the body, and the *inordinate gratification* of its desires. *Civility* between the excess of *compliment and flattery*, or *moroseness and rudeness*. And to instance in no more, *loyalty* and *fidelity* to the government under which we live, between an *undue compliance* with *arbitrary and illegal power*, and a *factious and seditious opposition* to it.

In such instances as these, it is the *common misfortune* of mankind too frequently to err, by flying from the dangers of one evil, into the destructive snares of the other. Here, therefore, Solomon advises to exercise our utmost caution; to turn not to the right hand nor to the left. Either is a deviation from the straight and direct path, and though one
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way may possibly conduct us into less difficulties than the other, we are fully persuaded, before we advance one step, that *both* are certainly wrong.

The last part of the advice is; that no motive, no temptation whatsoever should, at any time, prevail upon us to do a wicked or an immoral action. “Remove thy foot from evil.” It is, in fact, the sum of the advice contained in these words: that whatsoever is plainly immoral; contrary to any known law of God, though ever so plausible on *speculation* or *argument*, no temptation ever so alluring should reconcile us to it.

It is true, *circumstances* will alter the nature of moral actions, and render them either good or evil: *all circumstances*, therefore, are to be seriously and duly considered, agreeable to the former instruction: “ponder the path of thy feet.” This being done, whatsoever upon examination appears to our *judgment* and *reason* to be evil, we are not to venture upon it, under any *pretences* whatever. Good and evil are not of our own creating. God hath in *nature*, and by his *laws* determined, and for ever settled the difference between them, which the best exerted skill of human wisdom can neither *alter* or *amend*. God will not himself assume the liberty of doing evil; and we may be
well

well assured he will not allow *us* that liberty, which he has, in fact, denied *himself*: and we may observe that the original cause of God's displeasure towards mankind in general, is, that without his permission, nay, against his express command, they have presumed to chuse *evil rather than good*.

From this general view of Solomon's advice in the words of the text, let us endeavour to draw some useful inferences, in the application of it, to the approaching occasion.

The goodness of the cause in which you are engaging will best appear by considering the *ends* and *purposes* towards which your laudable endeavours are directed. These are the *domestick order*, and *good government* of the first, the most opulent city in the world: nor would I willingly offend by intimating the least *doubt* of your upright zeal in promoting the general, the public good. Every *good* and *honest man* will, in every station, endeavour to advance and establish the good and happiness of his country, which can only be done by an hearty attachment to that *system of religion and virtue*, which hath in it that harmony and consistence of design, which distinguish all the plans of perfect wisdom. Religion is the *excellency* of man, and *virtue* is his *real perfection*:

section: and the temper and genius of *our happy constitution* can only be promoted and maintained by the firm union of *public spirit*, and the inward principles of *true Christian faith and virtue*. For it is, in fact, owing to the excellent and perfect revelation of divine law, that we of this nation are united under a system of social and political government, which, as it bears the *strictest proportion*, the *nearest analogy* to the religion upon which it is founded, cannot fail, *when rightly administered*, of producing the most happy effects to all who are situated within its influence. It is our blessing to be placed under the auspices of the best religion, and the best government that was ever framed; and it is our indispensable duty to preserve that union upon which they are founded and maintained. The moment we lose sight of one, the other will gradually languish and decay. From this view we are naturally directed to turn our thoughts upon *ourselves*; to reap the best advantage we possibly can, in every pursuit of national *honour and security*. The temper of *these unsettled times*, calls for our particular attention, in the restoration of public peace, by all the methods of *strict integrity and honest zeal*. And although I may incur the charge of troublesome and impertinent officiousness, in declaring what some may not be inclined to hear, I shall not fear to offend, when *duty* so loudly calls upon me, in asserting that the want of *common honesty*, and *upright principles*,

is the chief obstruction to the general prosperity of this divided kingdom, and the good order, in particular, of this *disturbed and discontented city*. And we should do well to consider, that although the intent of religion is not to *compel* men to live in peace, yet it plainly recommends the duty by the strongest arguments. And whatever course *men* wilfully pursue, God will glorify his own wisdom, justice, and goodness in the government of the world; and, *in due time*, will fully reward those who have conscientiously followed the things that make for peace; and will as severely reckon with those whose restless spirits have at any time endeavoured to turn the world upside down. But since it may not have the desired effect to reproach those who are instrumental in promoting the *publick grievances*, I shall rather wish to impress the sense of *your duties* on your minds, by representing to you the *benefits of good government*, as the best means of securing your endeavours in the protection of it.

1st, Government secures to us the things that make life valuable; such as *liberty of persons, quiet possession of the fruit of our labours, authority to vindicate invaded rights, peace, plenty, and the like*. It secures even life itself to us, since there is no living *without government*.

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2dly, It promotes *knowledge*, and *those arts* which abate the natural fierceness and selfishness of men's tempers, which civilize and sweeten life.

3dly, It protects, encourages, and enforces the practice of *religion*, which ought to be dearer than life to us. Apply this to our own case, and we shall experimentally feel in what measure the purposes of good government are by *our constitution* intended to be served. Nor is their *sin* less than their *folly*, who practise against government, or lessen the esteem people ought to have of it, by *mal-administration*. On the contrary, every praise, and every reward is certainly due to the virtue of those rulers or magistrates, whose eyes (in the language of Solomon) look right on, and whose eyelids look straight before them; who by *justice* and *fair dealing* desire to be as useful and beneficial as they can to mankind: who endeavour to fulfil the end and design of that commission which *immediately*, or *mediately*, they have received from God: who being entrusted with the care of society, are *faithful to their trust*; and having laid themselves under *promises and oaths*, think themselves bound to observe and fulfil them: who consider themselves as the ministers of God, only for the good of the people, and therefore confine not their thoughts to themselves; carry on no *seaprate* interest from that of the publick, but act upon
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generous and honest principles, pondering the path of their feet, that their ways may be established; employing their time and their labours in promoting the peace and security, the happiness and prosperity of the society over which they are placed: who, as sent for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well, encourage the practice of virtue, and discountenance vice and profaneness: who turn not to the right hand nor to the left, but are impartial in the administration of justice; not respecting the *persons*, but regarding the *merits of the cause*; shewing mercy to those who are objects of compassion, but inflicting punishment upon obstinate and incorrigible offenders, and such as justly deserve to be set forth publick examples for the terror and admonition of others: who as guardians of the rights and properties of the people, stretch not their own power to their prejudice beyond its legal bounds; offer no violence *themselves* to oppress or dispossess them, nor suffer *others* to do it, whilst they are able to hinder them; but employ their power and authority to defend the innocent, vindicate the injured, rescue the miserable, and relieve the oppressed: who, in short, by cautiously removing their feet from evil, are publick blessings to their country; and, by their exemplary virtue and wise government, are the glorious instruments of our peace upon earth, and our happiness in heaven.

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It may now be unnecessary to recall your attention to the *late* services of your *present* chief magistrate, lest I should seem to influence your choice, which I am fully persuaded will be wisely directed by your own experience, and far better motives than any which (however willing) my weak abilities are able to suggest. Yet I should be wanting to myself and to the publick, should I take my leave of this assembly, without paying the proper tribute of applause, which is *ever* due to the character of *a good and honest man*; who in *the worst of times* seems to have considered before-hand the *price of discharging his duty*, and to have prepared himself against the *displeasure and censure of ill-affected men*. Who hath disdained the *low and vulgar* virtue which induces men to do good things, *only as long as they can be done with safety*; and hath nobly dared to do well, when he was *sure to suffer for it*. In one word, the judgment we pass upon a man's *worth*, is to be formed from his *outward actions*; and when we find a regular conduct; where all the duties to God and man, as far as we can observe, are exactly and punctually discharged; where there are no visible infractions of divine or human laws, or none but such as may be imputed to *human frailty*, we cannot but esteem a person so qualified, as a shining *pattern of probity, honour, and virtue*. This is indeed the *debt to common judgment*. True Christian *charity* improves upon

the principle, and obliges us, even where some *sus-
picions* may be thrown; if in other respects, *great
virtues* may be found; to err, if we must *necessarily*
err, on the *better* side, and make a *favourable con-
struction*.

F I N I S.

